



From the desk of
Representative Jim Moeller

Spring 2004



Dear Neighbor:

We finished the 2004 Legislative Session on time a few weeks ago.

As always, let me emphasize that it's an honor to serve southwestern Washington in the House of Representatives. Thank you for reviewing my account of our recent 60-day meeting in the state capital.

The legislative meeting this year discussed a big variety of issues. If you have questions or comments about anything in my letter today — or about other matters that you want to explore further — please don't hesitate to call or write!

Best wishes — and thank you again for caring enough about *your* Legislature to review my report.

A handwritten signature of Jim Moeller in black ink.

Jim Moeller

State Representative
49th Legislative District

693-0804 (local phone number)



✓ **Budget *redux*:**

Supplemental plan at least gets
Washington pointed in right direction

You might recall that I was not in favor of last year's operating budget, which included a raft of business-tax breaks and incentives. This kind of business benefit isn't necessarily a bad thing. But what I don't want is for these incentives to be financed on the backs of Washington families in need. Industries that get these breaks should be held accountable. A company should demonstrate that it's putting the additional money to good, productive use by creating good, productive jobs. **Tax incentives should not be mere giveaways.**

This year, most legislators remembered that a person in need is, after all, **a human being** — not just another sad statistic that gets in the way of a tidy bottom line. (I'll talk more later about the tax breaks that we looked at.) In fact, I supported this year's supplemental budget because it makes a start at providing a decent level of help for citizens. For example:

- ◆ **Health-care premiums are eliminated for Medicaid children in families whose income is less than 150 percent of the poverty level.**
- ◆ **Hospitals will get funding to help more of Washington's uninsured and medically indigent citizens.**
- ◆ **Community clinics will also get an extra boost.**
- ◆ **More money will go to school districts that don't have significant local-property-tax revenue to help them pay for their basic programs.**
- ◆ **Stronger financial support is provided to hike the number of positions available for students in our colleges and universities.**

Words to live by:

“Not all tax exemptions are created equal.”

Our state keeps about 200 tax breaks and exemptions on the books, ostensibly to encourage economic development — and the good-paying jobs that go with it. It's a beautiful theory. But in too many cases, these corporate giveaways come at a price that's simply too high. **(It's estimated that the cost to citizen-services in the budget is about \$5 billion every year.)**

Too much of the time, our state policy doesn't do enough for less-advantaged Washington people — while bending over backward for businesses. I saw a poll the other day that was aimed at figuring out where the public stands on business-tax exemptions. What the pollsters

found is that most folks don't want tax breaks for corporations to come at the expense of real people in need. People are adamant in demanding accountability: Businesses that get breaks must demonstrate that they have, in fact, used the boon to build jobs.

No, I don't oppose every single tax incentive — as I emphasized earlier. (I did sponsor legislation to get rid of the break for **country-club dues**.) **Sometimes these breaks are the right course for our state to set. I just want us to be smart about it.** Here are the major tax-break bills that passed the Legislature this year — and how I voted on them:

House Bill 2518	Tax exemption for public utilities on electricity sold to electrolytic-processing business	No
House Bill 2546	Tax credit for existing high-tech companies	No
House Bill 2675	Tax credit for electric utilities	No
House Bill 2929	Tax cut for beef processors	No
House Bill 3116	Tax cut for nonprofit blood, bone, tissue banks	Yes
House Bill 3158	Tax exemption for computer equipment for printing, publishing	No
Senate Bill 5034	Property-tax cut for senior citizens, disabled citizens	Yes
Senate Bill 6115	Tax exemption for amusement, recreation service donated to or by nonprofit charitable group or government	Yes
Senate Bill 6240	Tax incentive for help-desk companies in rural counties	No
Senate Bill 6304	Tax cut for aluminum smelter in Whatcom County	No



✓ **Left undone:**

Recalcitrant senators reject several proposals touting fair, common-sense policy

Any legislative report on our work this year in Olympia must also note things we **didn't** get accomplished. The House of Representatives passed and sent to the Senate a good many common-sense measures. Many of these bills actually received support from some of my Republican colleagues “across the aisle” in the House! But the Senate GOP leadership turned down most all of them. Patient-safety, human rights, assistance for veterans, and help for

hearing-impaired children and their families — these are some of the House-approved measures that were thwarted in the Senate this session.

◆ **Let's start with patient safety and medical malpractice.** The House approved legislation (*House Bill 2786*) both to establish a patient-safety program — and to encourage early settlement of malpractice claims to avoid costly legal battles. Although the Senate rejected that bill, we agreed on a similar patient-safety proposal (*Senate Bill 6210*). Unfortunately, the Senate denied our measures aimed at stopping inferior health-care practices (*House Bills 2834, 2879 and 3197*); relieving the medical-malpractice-insurance crisis (*House Bills 2816, 2837 and 2839*), and cutting the cost of malpractice-litigation (*House Bills 1926, 1927, 1928 and 2485*)

In the next legislative session, I'll keep working on patient-safety and medical-malpractice issues — and on these and other measures for which the Senate doom befell:

◆ **Basic human rights.** Legislation barring discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation won House approval again this year. This is a fair, common-sense proposal for civil rights for all six million human beings who call Washington home. (*House Bill 1809*)

◆ **Respect for veterans.** The House approved my legislation to strengthen services for veterans. According to this plan, our counties would establish Veterans' Assistance Programs and Veterans' Advisory Boards to make sure indigent veterans get some help. I worked with a coalition of veteran-organizations and county officials to get the bill before the Legislature this year. (*House Bill 2670*)

◆ **Hearing aids and implants.** Another bill that I prime-sponsored involves health carriers and state-purchased health plans. The bill would require that a carrier or state plan that provides coverage for prostheses must also cover hearing aids and cochlear implants. With these devices, children who are deaf or hearing-impaired can develop speech and language to join mainstream classes. Without this assistance, kids all too often become isolated and fall behind. (*House Bill 2890*)

If you want to know how I voted on any bill this session,
feel free to call my local number!



Representative Jim Moeller

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